



Stinking cedar



Plant Botanical Name:

Torreya taxifolia

Plant Threat Level:

Endangered

The Florida *Torreya* is one of the oldest tree species on earth with fossil records over 165 million years old. It was once scattered throughout the Northern Hemisphere and was driven south by glaciers that once covered the northern latitudes. When the glaciers retreated, the *Torreya taxifolia* became isolated in small pockets of the southeastern United States. The species thrived in its new habitat for thousands of years and in the early 1900s was listed as one of the region's most abundant trees. Unfortunately, most of the larger trees were harvested before 1950 for use as

Christmas trees, riverboat fuel, shingles and fence posts. With altered habitat from the construction of Lake Seminole and destruction from a fungal disease, today there are only about 200 trees left. It is listed as "Critically Endangered." However, it is hard to generate public sympathy for a prickly conifer whose pungent foliage gave it the common name stinking cedar. The USBG received a collection of this endangered species from the Atlanta Botanical Garden and the State Botanical Garden of Georgia. These two gardens helped form the Georgia Plant Conservation Alliance (GPCA), which works on conservation efforts. The GPCA monitors existing habitat and natural populations of *Torreya*, producing seedlings and cuttings for returning to protected sites. *Photo credit: Atlantic Botanical Garden*

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